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RADIO PROPAGANDA REPORT

NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN SOVIET PROPAGANDA

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PROPAGANDA REPORT
23 DECEMBER 1953

NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN SOVIET PROPAGANDA

Summary and Conclusions

Soviet radio propaganda on atomic weapons is characterized by (1) extremely low volume of comment (0.09%), with almost nothing on new Western developments (e.g., atomic submarine), broken only by a few major Soviet pronouncements; (2) heavy emphasis on atomic control and disarmament, with avoidance of stress on Western military plans and preparation (including particularly references to radiation and implications of retaliation); (3) until recently, only minor (but consistent and perhaps indicative) differentiation of comment for different audiences, except that Americans hear a very high proportion of atomic control comment.

This pattern of extreme caution may reflect the Soviet elite's own fear of atomic weapons. They almost certainly estimate that their own people fear war in general and the atomic bomb in particular; the subject is particularly cautiously handled in domestic propaganda. After Soviet acquisition of the bomb the only marked departure from previous practice was the decline of material debunking the bomb as the decisive military weapon.

Indications immediately following the Soviet thermonuclear announcements in August 1953 that atomic propaganda was to become more prominent in the daily radio diet for all audiences were not borne out; comment dropped back to a very low level in the month prior to Eisenhower's 8 December speech. For the first time Moscow had undertaken something of a propaganda drive on this topic in French broadcasts and in its Arabic, Turkish, Persian and Greek beams; and the East German radio heavily attacked the stationing of atomic gun battalions in Western Germany, though without Soviet radio support. But these limited efforts ceased with two or three weeks, despite the continuation of aggressive comment on other topics tailored for these audiences.

Atomic scaremongering in these instances was brief, indirect and short-range, not strategic; but it does indicate a greater flexibility on the subject than in the past. Whether this change reflects the narrowing of the power gap with Soviet acquisition of the H-bomb or is only a part of the generally greater propaganda flexibility observable since the change in Soviet leadership cannot at present be tested. The propaganda implementation of Soviet policy toward President Eisenhower's U.N. proposal may yield evidence on this question.

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Discussion

The overriding characteristic of Soviet propaganda treatment of the atomic bomb is the extreme and consistent caution with which the subject has been handled ever since the first bomb was exploded over Japan.

One piece of direct evidence as to the reasons for almost complete silence on the initial explosions is supplied by the editor of an "important" Soviet paper in response to a question by Alexander Werth as to why this is so: "Our people are much too upset by the whole damn thing."* The editor might have spoken also for the Party elite, to judge by its public reactions.

The first two sections below review the general character of Soviet atomic propaganda. Section III uses the treatment of the topic in certain languages to gauge Soviet estimates of the psychological vulnerability of the audience to the atomic threat. The last section discusses recent trends.

I. Volume of Discussion: Very Low

The rarity with which Radio Moscow** devotes whole commentaries to any aspect of atomic matters is illustrated in the following data on broadcasts for the one and one-half year period just prior to Malenkov's 8 August announcement of Soviet possession of the hydrogen bomb. Total number of broadcast commentaries on atomic subjects: 101. Total number of broadcast commentaries on all subjects: 112,040. Percentage attention: 0.09%, or one out of every 1109 commentaries broadcast. By way of comparison the following figures indicate volume of discussion on other propaganda topics of a world-wide nature during the same period:

<u>Topic</u>	<u>Number of Commentaries</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Korean War	9847	8.8
Peace Campaign	7271	6.5
Aggression	5252	4.7
Bacterial Warfare	3384	3.0
East-West Trade	1989	1.8
Espionage	794	.7
East-West Amity	492	.4
Atomic Subjects	101	.09

* Quoted by Frederick Barghoorn in "The Soviet Image of the United States," p. 163. Barghoorn's Chapter VIII is a useful review and analysis of the Soviet propaganda and attitudes on atomic energy through 1949.

** Spot evidence indicates that the volume, incidence and nature of press comment on this topic are the same as those of radio comment, a generalization true for most of the subject matter of Soviet propaganda.

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There have been occasions, outside this 18-month period, when atomic matters have been given sudden great spurts of attention by Soviet-inspired events. Principal examples are Stalin's PRAVDA interview in October 1951, the TASS announcement of the first Soviet atomic explosion in September 1949, Soviet disarmament proposals at the United Nations, and the Soviet announcement of its first H-bomb explosion in August 1953. In almost all cases, however, the volume of discussion declines within a week or two to its previous routine level. Commentaries on other subjects sometimes mention atomic matters in passing, but the frequency of such references, except in connection with the Stockholm peace appeal in 1950, has been similarly low.

II. Atomic Themes: Military Aspects Avoided, Control Stressed

The caution reflected in low magnitude of attention is further illustrated in the specific atomic themes Radio Moscow chooses to employ:

1. Military Applications of Atomic Energy: The military aspects of the bomb, aggressive preparations, and intentions concerning atomic warfare are given surprisingly little emphasis in view of the huge volume of commentaries discussing other forms of aggressive preparations, such as NATO, U.S. bases, etc. Thus in 1952 there were some 5200 items containing general aggression charges, of which only twelve specifically played up atomic aggression. It seems clear that although Western military preparations rank among the top five topics of Communist propaganda, the Agitprop has virtually banned the use of one of the most potent fear-invoking subjects of aggression propaganda--the atomic weapon.

The converse of imputations of atomic aggression are claims of Soviet military strength based on their possession of the atomic bomb. The avoidance of this topic is so extreme as to constitute practically a total omission. No commentaries in 1952 used this theme, and even on sentence level there were few and only the most generalized claims. Stalin's October 1951 interview, the most striking exception to this rule, claimed that the USSR was testing bombs of various calibres, but was quick to say that this fact should cause no alarm and to call again for atomic control.

Soviet propaganda habitually steers clear of descriptions of detail in respect to Western aggression (such as of military materiel), but comment on the atomic aspect of aggression is even more general than elsewhere. For example, implications of atomic retaliation are both rare and guarded. The famous Stockholm peace appeal of 1950 condemned that State which "first" used the atomic bomb, but used no threatening overtones. Statements with such overtones are rare and usually go unreported.

The Soviets are also cautious in even alluding to the results of an atomic bomb blast in any detail. Except for occasionally specifying the numbers killed at Hiroshima, little is said on this aspect. The effect of atomic blast most extremely avoided in the propaganda is radiation. Probably not more than four or five times has even the existence of radiation been mentioned or implied, and a number of

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these references were made in ridicule. Thus a Baku item broadcast only once in Persian, in December 1952, satirically described the attempts of a Washington business man to sell bogus clothing designed to protect against radiation.

2. Atomic Control: Over the past seven years, the lion's share of atomic propaganda has been given over to outlining Soviet proposals for U.S. obstruction of the international control of atomic energy. Vishinsky's U.N. speeches on atomic disarmament every autumn are given relatively full play. Soviet comment focuses on the point that the West unreasonably opposes "immediate and unconditional" banning of the bomb. Means of establishing control are little discussed. The "simple and clear" proposal for a ban is what the propaganda stresses as immediately understandable to every man in the street.

The usual evil motives are attributed to the U.S. failure to agree to such an "obviously" sensible declaration--the profit motive, military intentions, intimidation of other countries, etc. This approach concentrating on the simple, apparently straightforward line that the West refuses to declare in favor of banning the bomb, diverts attention from the serious basis of Western objections to the Soviet proposals, namely the question of inspection, and so allows the propagandist to get off the defensive. Instead of having to answer Western objections of evasiveness about inspection--and "answering" is poor propaganda in any situation--he can attack Western refusals to accede to unconditional banning of the bomb.

The Agitprop apparently estimates that the United States is the principal block to agreement on the Soviet disarmament proposal, and that something can be done with propaganda to convince American audiences of the reasonableness of its control plan and to bring pressure against their government. This conclusion is based on the fact that routine items calling for atomic control are beamed almost nine times as often to American audiences as to the next highest target audience, although the effort is not a large one absolutely. Tailoring of this kind is quite exceptional in Soviet propaganda, which by and large does not single out particular subjects for particular audiences.

Apparently, then, the Soviet effort in this respect is designed to create a pattern of action rather than merely to increase diffuse resentment against American intransigence, as similar propaganda to Europeans would be intended. This pattern reflects a tactical calculation rather than a long-range one.

In connection with its positive appeals for control, the propaganda curiously fails to do much at all with peacetime uses of atomic energy. Occasional allusions to the general and prospective applications of atomic power are the exception. This failure is particularly strange in view of the way in which such propaganda could be made to complement the enormous emphasis given the peace campaign and to show the fruits which would flow from achieving international control. Perhaps it reflects one aspect of Soviet security, although the existence of a 'Davidov Plan' has been alluded to by the Polish radio.

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III. The Beaming of Atomic Comment

While there is some tailoring of atomic comment for specific audiences, it can be said that no sustained propaganda drives have been mounted toward any individual country except the United States, where one-third of all the routine material was beamed in 1952.

Germany: Although Germany hears more atomic comment than any country except the United States, the preponderance is not great and the military applications of atomic energy are generally avoided. Thus when the first atomic gun battalion was sent to Germany in the fall of 1953, Moscow devoted two commentaries to the event but avoided giving any subsequent support to the considerable campaign mounted by Radio Berlin in protest against the stationing of the atomic gun battalions on German soil.

United Kingdom: Radio Moscow does not dwell directly on atomic questions in its broadcasts to Britain. However, the theme of Britain as an American aircraft carrier is frequently used, and Moscow has broadcast rather detailed descriptions of U.S. air bases and the SAC atomic bombing mission, and even implied the threat of atomic retaliation in disguised form. Such material was less used in 1953 than in 1952.

France: From Stalin's October 1951 statement through August 1953 not a single commentary on this topic was tailored particularly for French listeners, and French-language discussion of atomic matters in general was at a minimum. This pattern was altered after the Soviet thermo-nuclear announcement by a limited propaganda drive which lasted from mid-September 1953 into early October. The material used, however, shows that this drive was a facet of the "German danger" campaign being waged against ratification of the EDC. Apparently initiated following the arrival of U.S. atomic battalions in Europe, the atomic propaganda sputtered out well before the broader campaign reached its climax in December. Thus, precisely at the time when Moscow was playing up the German threat with obvious scaremongering and was voicing unusual appeals to French national pride, it avoided full use of the atomic gun battalion development and failed to sustain even a low level of attention to atomic matters.

Spain: As with France, Moscow failed to carry through with even a modest propaganda drive to Spain following the charge that atomic bombs would be stored on Spanish soil as a result of the bases pact in September 1953. Moscow did not stress this charge in its pact comment, and when subsequent Western press comment on Air Secretary Talbot's reported atom bomb storage plan provided the Soviet propagandists with a further peg for the theme, they did not use it. Nor was there any general increase in discussion of atomic control or related themes which might have kept the mere word "atomic" on the air.

Middle East:* Like the French, the Middle East countries heard an unusual spate of atomic comment during early October 1953, which similarly died away. The tactics behind the short-lived drive are obscure, but the coincidence with other beams makes it improbable that it was accidental. The themes emphasized were banal (control and U.S. atomic hysteria) and were

* Including Iran, Turkey, and Greece.

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neither tailored for Middle East consumption nor tied to current events in the area. Probably the drive was a tension-inducing effort associated with the then-current denunciation of a northern Middle East Defense Organization. As in the case of France, the effort soon was abandoned, even while the accompanying greater truculence of Soviet broadcasts to the Middle East continued.

Viewed over a longer period, however, Moscow has routinely beamed a somewhat disproportionate volume of atomic comment to the Middle East. An exceptional case of such disproportionate beaming was the September 1949 TASS announcement of Soviet acquisition of the secret of the atomic bomb, along with roundups of foreign press comment. It illustrates one of the techniques for extreme but indirect scaremongering available to Soviet propaganda any time it is desired to utilize it:

Language	Number of Items	Number per 100 minutes of broadcasting time
Turkish	13	12.4
Persian	10	11.1
Serbocroat and Macedonian	10	2.9
Czechoslovakian	1	0.8
English to North America	6	3.8
English to United Kingdom	2	1.5

In the TASS reviews of foreign press comment at the time, the following was quoted from the BOMBAY CHRONICLE: "...a turn has come in the destiny of a number of countries such as, for example, Iran and Turkey, which hitherto lived under the umbrella of the American bomb."

Other Countries: The Scandinavian beam is notable for the fact that aside from major pronouncements it contains almost no comment on atomic questions. During the whole of 1952 one Vishinsky speech was the only atomic commentary broadcast to Finland, Norway, Sweden, or Denmark. This extreme avoidance contrasts with emphasis on bases and other aggression components in these languages. Japan receives more than its random share of atomic comment, but the focus is either on the Hiroshima anniversary or on such non-military aspects as Japanese failure to provide for children made homeless after the explosion. Similarly, Japanese audiences hear little or nothing concerning the possible use of the bomb in Korea or China, although such items are broadcast elsewhere. This suggests there is no effort whatever to imply that the possible use of the bomb on the Asian continent could have frightening consequences for Japan.* Comment to Yugoslavia shows no Soviet estimate of particular sensitivity.

* Peking broadcasts to Japan in 1953 have been extremely low in atomic content, and some Japanese "protests" against the bomb beamed elsewhere have not been aired in Japanese. Peking's other beams, including the home service, have likewise given well under one percent of their total attention to atomic matters in 1953, although earlier--during the active phase of the Korean war--there was more comment. (For a partial review of this material see the three Goldhamner studies produced by the Rand Corporation.)

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To the Soviet domestic audience, the volume of commentary is small and particularly avoids the military aspects (only one such item--describing A-bomb bases in France--was carried in the Home Service in 1952). A marked effort was made to stress the peaceful aspects of Stalin's October 1951 PRAVDA interview in exclusively domestic broadcasts while broadcasts abroad were playing up U.S. warmongering and America's dark motives in refusing to agree to control. Emphasis on control is somewhat higher in the Home Service than elsewhere, a pattern consistent with a similar stress on general disarmament. This avoidance of tension-producing themes is complemented by the fact that only in the Home Service was there discussion of Anglo-American disagreement over sharing atomic secrets. Home Service news items similarly avoid the atomic theme. Only eleven items out of 14,000 concern the subject, a proportion about the same as for commentaries.

IV. Current Developments

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Following the 20 August announcement of a hydrogen bomb explosion, Soviet propaganda mounted a limited world-wide drive which was sustained for a longer period than ever before. Discounting Soviet U.N. proposals, the previous three major propaganda splurges on atomic subjects--the TASS announcement in 1949, Truman's go-ahead on H-bomb development in January 1950, and Stalin's October 1951 interview--all received voluminous but brief attention, two weeks at most. This fall's effort, however, seemed planned for prolonged duration. This was indicated by the sustained volume of propaganda and seemed borne out by the Soviet decision to announce atomic tests on 18 September following by only one month the H-bomb test communique. It will be recalled that subsequent to Stalin's October 1951 interview there were no Soviet announcements of the tests reported by the AEC.

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This pattern raised the possibility that atomic propaganda strategy had entered a new stage. Having narrowed the power gap with the United States by a presumably successful testing of their first hydrogen bomb, the Soviets might have decided to make greater use of the scaremongering potential of the atomic theme as a continuing practice. Through mid-October this hypothesis seemed to be confirmed, or at least not contradicted, by:

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1. The limited drive against French and Middle East audiences.
2. Possibly the East German campaign against the atomic gun battalions.
3. A fair amount of ridicule of Washington "hysteria" over what to do about continental defense.

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But from mid-October on, the incipient campaign faltered and died. While comment on Soviet control proposals continued fitfully, special treatment for individual audiences ceased, save for the standard emphasis on control for American audiences. Moscow was virtually silent on atomic matters during the month prior to the President's 8 December initiative at the United Nations. In contrast to previous years, the propaganda did not even use the peg of the Soviet disarmament proposals then under active discussion in the U.N. General Assembly.

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Although the USSR had thus not changed strategy to include the regular practice of atomic scaremongering, it had made limited short-term use of atomic propaganda for tactical purposes to France and the Middle East at least. Limited and indirect as these drives were, they constituted a new tactic in Soviet atomic propaganda which supposedly will be used again if the need appears strong enough.

After the initial confusion of Soviet propaganda at the President's "atomic bank" plan, the official reply is being broadcast widely. Its treatment cannot yet be assessed at this writing.

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